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Summary record of the 408th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 4 September 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Degener

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Submission of reports by parties to the Convention under article 35 (*continued*)

Initial report of Bulgaria (continued) (CRPD/C/BGR/1; CRPD/C/BGR/Q/1 and CRPD/C/BGR/Q/1/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Bulgaria took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 11–20 (continued)

2. **Ms. Tsenova** (Bulgaria), responding to questions raised at the previous meeting, said that the rights of victims of domestic violence were enumerated in the Protection from Domestic Violence Act, which had been adopted in 2005. The Act contained a definition of domestic violence, determined the range of punishments to be imposed on perpetrators and stated that everyone could seek protection under the law, including persons with disabilities. Every year, as required under the Act, the Ministry of Justice set funds aside to enable non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to contribute to the fight against domestic violence. In recent years, more than 30 NGOs had received funding for their efforts to combat domestic violence. In 2014, a training session had been organized to help judges become more familiar with the measures that could be taken to combat domestic violence, while projects set up in 2015 had involved working with perpetrators, reintegrating victims and sharpening the skills of social workers. In addition, domestic violence awareness-raising campaigns were conducted in the country's schools.

3. Persons with disabilities were entitled to support in their dealings with the justice system, in particular when they were defendants or when there were doubts about their ability to provide evidence. Police officers and prison and medical staff were required by law to have specific qualifications to work with persons with psychosocial disabilities. Police officers were trained at an academy run by the Ministry of the Interior. The training placed considerable emphasis on human rights. One course, taught in the first and second years, covered the rights enshrined by the Convention. In another course, instruction was provided on how to deal with persons with disabilities, including children, who were victims of domestic violence. A number of other courses offered at the academy — on criminal procedure, for instance, and on protection from discrimination — also covered matters of relevance to persons with disabilities.

4. **Ms. Kanyova** (Bulgaria) said that children, including children with disabilities, were protected from exploitation, violence and abuse not only by the Protection from Domestic Violence Act but also by the Child Protection Act, the aims of which were to prevent violence against children, coordinate efforts to combat it and ensure that child victims received support. Under the latter act, the Child Protection Department, municipal authorities and representatives of the regional police departments were required to work together. In some cases, multidisciplinary teams also included health officials, general practitioners and representatives of NGOs that worked with child victims of violence. Social assistance directorates were responsible for ensuring that measures were taken to assist such victims. The number of reports of violence against children had fallen in recent years. A national programme for the prevention of violence against children had been adopted in 2017. The programme's emphasis was on taking effective measures to prevent child abuse, including sexual violence. Activities designed to improve inter-institutional responses to cases of violence against children were also carried out as part of the programme. Bulgaria had a toll-free hotline that provided information to children anywhere in the country. The line had received some 85,000 calls in 2016, most relating to interpersonal relationships, family matters, social problems and health care. Bulgaria also had crisis centres for child victims of violence. One of the objectives of ongoing reform was to ensure that such centres were available throughout the country. There were currently 23, which could accommodate a total of 246 children, in 14 of the country's 28 first-level administrative divisions.

5. **Ms. Miteva** (Bulgaria) said that the aim of community-based social services, including residential facilities, was to allow persons with disabilities to live in a family-like

environment. Small group homes, of which there were several varieties, had at most 15 residents, although some had no more than 8. A focus on enhancing the competencies of social workers and staff members of the regional offices of the Social Assistance Agency helped ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities were protected. A project that would conclude in 2019, for example, sought to build the capacities of social assistance providers. The project, for which 28 million Bulgarian leva had been set aside, had been set up in large part to prepare for the planned deinstitutionalization of older persons and persons with disabilities by ensuring, inter alia, that social workers and other social service personnel had the training to deal with the expected changes. Multidisciplinary approaches would be stressed, individual needs assessment and support plans introduced and cross-sectoral training sessions organized as part of the project.

6. Members of specially trained teams would complete the individual assessments that would be required as efforts to move older people and people with disabilities out of institutions began in earnest. Individual support plans would prepare such people, especially those who had spent a long time in institutions, to return to the community. Their preferences would be taken into account. The entire process would involve medical specialists and providers of social services, including NGOs. Programmes would be implemented to promote the social inclusion of, and provide support for, persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. Job training and employment would be provided with the support of the National Employment Agency, municipalities, social service providers and NGOs.

7. Some of the amendments made to the Social Assistance Act in early 2016 had been intended to improve access to social services, including by ensuring that the users of such services could exercise their rights and that their needs were fully assessed. The amendments provided that the preferences of adults under both full and partial guardianship must be taken into account. The preferences expressed by adults under partial guardianship would take precedence over those of their guardians. More safeguards had been introduced for adults under full guardianship, establishing clear terms and conditions for their placement in institutions. The courts were required to consider the preferences of the person concerned and could only place that person in an institution if there were no other alternatives.

8. One of the main objectives of the National Long-Term Care Strategy was to prevent children from being sent to institutions and ensure that they were not moved to residential facilities for adults when they came of age. Emphasis was placed, instead, on ensuring the provision of family-style or foster care and on day care, social rehabilitation and early childhood development. The action plan for the implementation of the National Long-term Care Strategy had been developed and drafted with the active participation of NGOs. One of the plan's stated objectives was to create the conditions that would enable persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community, in line with article 19 of the Convention.

9. **Ms. Disheva** (Bulgaria) said that social services were provided in the home or community or in specialized institutions according to the preferences and personal choices of the persons who needed them, with the aim of supporting social inclusion and independent living. The relevant legislation had been amended in 2016 to introduce a differentiated approach to the provision of social services for adults, depending on the target group and type of disabilities. The main objective was to meet the individual needs of persons with disabilities. Services included personal assistance, home visits and community-based part-time care and rehabilitation. There were also temporary residential centres, family-type residential centres and protected and supervised homes for persons with disabilities, as well as specialized institutions for specific disabilities.

10. The main priority of social services reform was the transition from institutional to community-based care. Between 2014 and 2017, there had been a decrease in the number of specialized institutions and the number of people accommodated in them, with a corresponding increase in the number of persons with disabilities receiving community-based social services, which had risen from 6,000 adults in 2014 to 7,000 adults in 2018. As of July 2018, there had been more than 700 community-based social services specifically for adults and children with disabilities. Irrespective of whether they were under

guardianship or had full capacity, all persons with disabilities had the right to indicate whether they wished to use social services and where they wanted to live. In terms of the cost of social services, adults paid a percentage of their income, but children and persons without any income were exempt from paying fees. Social services providers drafted individual support plans for service users, based on their needs.

11. **Ms. Miteva** (Bulgaria) said that, since 2017, the Government had been working to ensure the sustainability of the social services currently receiving support from the European Structural and Investment Funds. Independent living projects were being implemented by all municipalities in the country, which, through an agreement with the Social Assistance Agency, received resources to provide services for persons with disabilities, such as personal assistance and home assistance. In the second half of 2017, more than 7,000 persons had used personal assistance services. In 2018, over 68 million leva had been provided for the continued provision of such services.

12. **Mr. Baychev** (Bulgaria) said that the Government provided a package of measures to support the mobility and independence of persons with disabilities, such as specially trained and licensed guide dogs for blind persons. Persons with visual impairments and their guide dogs had free access to public places and public transportation. There was also a social rehabilitation and integration centre for persons with visual impairments, set up in 2012 with a capacity of 20 places, funded by the national budget. Persons with disabilities were also provided with financial support to enable them to buy specially adapted cars to allow them to travel to work or study. Persons with a degree of disability of more than 50 per cent were exempt from paying tolls for using the country's road network. There was now a fast-track procedure for applying for that exemption online or by post.

13. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy had received proposals from national representative organizations of persons with disabilities to expand the list of assistive devices, such as special wheelchairs for children, for which persons with disabilities could receive support. A task force of experts had been set up to regularly update the list. The procedure for obtaining assistive devices had been simplified and expedited.

14. **Mr. Koralski** (Bulgaria) added that the Government spent almost 50 million leva annually on medical aids and devices and that public transportation was free of charge for all persons with disabilities.

15. **Ms. Harizanova** (Bulgaria) said that the challenges faced in the area of mental health included the fact that a number of medical experts left the country to work abroad. The National Health Strategy contained a section on mental health. Measures to implement the Strategy included continuing the process of deinstitutionalization, reformulating the functions of psychiatric hospitals and providing an environment that was as close to a natural environment as possible for patients. In 2016, seven psychiatric wards had been renovated, over 600 medical staff had been trained and awareness campaigns had been conducted with a view to overcoming the stigma associated with mental disabilities. An inter-institutional working group was currently drafting a national programme for psychiatric health for the period 2018–2025.

16. **Mr. Koralski** (Bulgaria) said that the Government attached great importance to protection and assistance for persons with disabilities during humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters. All municipal services and offices had protocols for working in situations of risk and emergency. The Agency for Persons with Disabilities had an information system that identified persons with disabilities by address and type of disability. In the event of an emergency, persons with disabilities were given priority. Rescue teams were trained to provide appropriate assistance depending on the type of disability. With regard to the employment of persons with disabilities in the justice system, many persons with disabilities studied law, and a number of persons with disabilities in senior positions in government and civil society institutions had a legal background, including the president of the Union of the Blind of Bulgaria and members of the Ombudsman's Office and the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. There were already lawyers with disabilities, including visual impairments, working in the justice system, and it was to be hoped that the Supreme Judicial Council would soon appoint a person with a disability as a judge.

Articles 21–33

17. **Mr. Martin** said that it was his understanding that persons with intellectual disabilities under guardianship could not set up or be part of organizations of persons with disabilities because they lacked legal capacity. Was that true? If so, he wished to know whether there were any plans to change that situation. He would be interested to know whether the Government provided public information in Easy Read format for citizens with an intellectual disability. Noting that persons with intellectual disabilities generally had worse health outcomes and did not live as long as others, he asked what the Government planned to do to improve health outcomes for all persons with intellectual disabilities, especially children living in institutions.

18. **Mr. Alsaif** said that he would be interested to hear more about measures taken to prevent children with disabilities from being separated from their families and placed in institutions and to provide a network of primary support services for children with disabilities and their families, especially in remote and rural areas. He would welcome information on any plans to revoke provisions of the Family Code that restricted the right to marry for persons with disabilities under full guardianship. He would like to know how free access to the medicines and supplies required by persons as a result of their impairment was guaranteed. Information on measures to raise awareness of the human rights model of disability among all health professionals, including training on the right to free and informed consent, would also be appreciated. He would like to know to what extent persons with disabilities and their representative organizations were involved in international cooperation. It would also be interesting to learn how organizations of persons with disabilities were participating in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and how the human rights model of disability was being mainstreamed in the implementation of measures to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Lastly, he would like to know what time frame was envisaged for the designation of an independent monitoring mechanism in line with article 33 of the Convention.

19. **Mr. Ruskus** said that, while the adoption of the Preschool and School Education Act in 2016 was commendable, there were concerns that it was being applied in a very formalistic way and without properly equipping mainstream schools for inclusive education. He would like an update on how many children with disabilities attended mainstream schools and received support to study the same curriculum and obtain the same qualifications as other children. Information on the types of disabilities those children had would also be welcome. He wished to know what concrete steps the Government planned to take to ensure that all children with disabilities had access to inclusive education. He would be grateful for information on specific Government programmes to support persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities in their efforts to obtain employment, including through inclusive vocational education and support for employers. He would like to know how the right to health was ensured; in particular, he wondered about the availability of medication and assistive devices and community-based services for adults and children with neurological and cognitive conditions and chronic, genetic and rare diseases. It would also be interesting to hear about the accessibility of sports events and facilities for persons with disabilities, support and recognition of athletes with disabilities on an equal basis with others and the promotion of the Paralympic Games in the media.

20. **The Chair** said that she would like to know how the most vulnerable children were protected under the Preschool and School Education Act and how it would be ensured that children with intellectual disabilities could attend mainstream schools. If the Act was not accompanied by an accessibility plan for all schools, many children would be left behind. She would be interested to know whether there were any measures to provide women with disabilities with access to reproductive and sexual health services, including accessible maternal health, family planning, gynaecology and midwifery services. Information on any supported parenthood programmes for parents with intellectual disabilities would also be welcome. While Bulgaria joined the Committee in opposing the adoption of the draft Additional Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (Oviedo Convention) concerning the protection of human rights and dignity of persons with mental disorders with regard to involuntary placement and involuntary treatment, it did not have a good record when it came to involuntary treatment in the mental health system. She

wondered if there were any programmes or hospitals working to decrease involuntary treatment. Lastly, she would like to know how it would be ensured that all persons with disabilities, including those under guardianship and in institutions, had the right to vote and that the electoral system was fully accessible.

21. **Mr. Buntan** said that he would be grateful for additional information on the concrete action taken by the State party to ensure that persons with disabilities were actively involved in and consulted on the development of plans, protocols and policies concerning disaster risk reduction and humanitarian activities. He wished to learn whether asylum seekers and refugees with disabilities were provided with the same services as those without disabilities. Clarification of the legal status of Bulgarian Sign Language and Braille would be appreciated. In addition, it would be helpful to hear how the authorities ensured that public information was systematically made available in accessible formats, including Easy Read. He would also appreciate more details regarding the technical and financial support provided to organizations of persons with disabilities to enable them to engage actively in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies relating to the Convention, including whether there was a legal requirement for the Government to provide such support. It would be interesting to hear the delegation's comments on how the establishment of residential group homes, which imposed restrictions on their residents, was consistent with the deinstitutionalization plan.

22. **Mr. Tatić** said that he would appreciate clarification of whether the calls made to the national hotline mentioned by the delegation had been made by children with disabilities. He would also be grateful for information on how many children with disabilities who had been exposed to violence had benefited from protective mechanisms. Data on the percentage of public websites that conformed to international standards on accessibility for blind persons would be welcome. It would also be useful to receive information on how much the State party intended to invest in the provision of reasonable accommodation and individualized support for inclusive education over the next two to five years. The Committee had received reports of instances in which teachers and parents had displayed negative attitudes towards students with disabilities at schools; he wondered whether there were any awareness-raising measures to combat such attitudes.

23. He would be grateful for data on the unemployment rate among persons with disabilities as compared with that of persons without disabilities. He would also appreciate information on any measures taken to assist persons with disabilities and their families with the additional financial burden they faced. Lastly, it would be interesting to learn about opportunities for accessible tourism in the State party.

The meeting was suspended at 11.35 a.m. and resumed at 12.05 p.m.

24. **Ms. Harizanova** (Bulgaria) said that the six priorities being pursued under the second Action Plan for the Implementation of the Convention and the National Long-term Care Strategy focused mainly on increasing accessibility for and participation by persons with disabilities. The first of the six priorities was centred on the home environment and transportation. In addition to areas such as road infrastructure and accessible public buildings and open spaces, it covered information and communications technologies and the Internet, in line with the provisions of articles 9 and 21 of the Convention. The main activities conducted in that connection included the identification and removal of barriers to accessibility and the implementation of accessibility standards. A working group had been established to facilitate the incorporation of the provisions of the European Commission Web Accessibility Directive into national legislation. Steps were also being taken to harmonize national legislation with European Union regulations and standards and to enhance access to information through the use of Braille and sign language. The cities of Sofia and the city of Burgas had both adopted strategies designed to maximize the accessibility of public transport.

25. The second priority was providing equal access to inclusive education. The areas it covered included measures to ensure an accessible and supportive environment in kindergartens and schools, the upgrading of skills among teaching staff, the introduction of early intervention measures and the provision of career guidance and extracurricular

activities. In higher education, a project was under way to support students with special educational needs in applying to and attending university, including at the doctorate level.

26. The third priority was ensuring effective access to health services, including measures to raise awareness among medical professionals regarding the human rights and the dignity, independence and needs of persons with disabilities. Steps were also being taken to ensure appropriate interventions to prevent further disability and to provide facilities for the diagnosis, treatment and medical and social rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

27. The fourth priority was aimed at implementing measures for the employment of persons with disabilities, including protected employment and appropriate jobs for persons with severe disabilities, developing incentives for the establishment of specialized enterprises of persons with disabilities, introducing clear rules for employers of persons with disabilities and increasing opportunities for remote working and entrepreneurship. The fifth priority was providing community-based support, including materials and facilities, for persons with disabilities, and the sixth priority was ensuring access to sports, recreation and tourism for persons with disabilities, including through measures to increase opportunities for participation in sports clubs and cultural life.

28. The process of drafting the National Long-term Care Strategy had been carried out with the participation of all national organizations representing persons with disabilities, including those with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. The Government provided subsidies to such organizations, and other NGOs were able to apply for project funding from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.

29. **Ms. Aleksov** (Bulgaria) said that the Preschool and School Education Act had established inclusive education as a policy priority. The Act contained provisions aimed at ensuring that inclusive education was based on the individual needs of the child and that children with special educational needs received additional support. In addition to 28 inclusive education support centres, regional teams had been set up to support the development of children with special educational needs, including individualized assessments for children whose parents had applied to enrol them in specialized schools. Students graduating from the seventh and tenth grades could be referred to vocational education or training programmes.

30. During the 2017/18 academic year, 18,000 children with special educational needs had attended mainstream schools and approximately 4,000 had attended kindergartens. Regional inclusive education centres had provided support to more than 7,000 students. Overall, 3,728 pedagogical experts, 1,397 resources teachers, more than 700 psychologists, more than 500 speech therapists, 69 rehabilitators and approximately 700 counsellors had been employed. The Ministry of Education and Science was designing a training programme on equal access for development. In 2017, 500 staff from the regional centres had participated in training sessions aimed at upgrading skills in conducting individualized assessments for children with special education needs. Over a thousand pedagogical experts, speech therapists, psychologists and teachers were working alongside parents in 80 schools to support the development of students.

31. On 1 August 2017, special schools for children with intellectual difficulties had been closed and reconfigured into 43 centres providing support for more than 2,000 children with special educational needs who were attending mainstream schools. There were also five schools for children with sensory impairments, three for children with hearing impairments and two for children with visual impairments. Overall, the number of children attending specialized schools and special education support centres was decreasing as a result of the inclusive education policy.

32. Children received support to help them adapt as they moved through the different stages of the education system. Educational content was tailored to the needs of each child, and included the use of specialized technology, therapeutic support and rehabilitation. Special materials and aids were available, and exams could be adapted if necessary, including through the use of Braille or Easy Read formats. The physical environment in schools, kindergartens and regional centres was also adapted to the special needs of children with disabilities.

33. The Ministry of Education and Science had established a programme entitled "Science and Education for Smart Growth", which provided budgetary resources for initiatives such as early prevention and intervention for children with special educational needs. In 2019, more than 20 million leva would be allocated to enhancing the efforts of pedagogical experts who worked with such children.

34. **Mr. Naydenov** (Bulgaria) said that, over the previous 10 years, unemployed persons with permanent disabilities had been prioritized in government policy on employment. Persons with disabilities benefited from both general and specific programmes and measures intended to boost employment, including a national employment programme for persons with disabilities. The National Employment Agency had also contributed to efforts to increase employment among persons with disabilities. Funding provided under national programmes for the promotion of employment among persons with disabilities had increased from 14 million leva in 2015 to 18 million in 2017.

35. As a result of the measures taken in recent years, the number of persons with disabilities in employment had risen from around 8,000 in 2015 to almost 11,000 in 2017. Employment rates for men and women with disabilities were similar; the rate had been around 20 per cent in 2017, about 2.5 per cent higher than in 2014. Unemployment among persons with disabilities had dropped 10 percentage points, from 18.6 per cent to 8.5 per cent, between 2014 and 2017, and was currently only around 2.3 per cent higher than the rate for the general population. The National Institute of Statistics gathered data quarterly, broken down by gender, age and level of education, among other factors, on employment among persons whose capacity to work was partially reduced.

36. In August 2017, following the establishment of two training projects for young people and adults with disabilities, the National Employment Agency had begun taking requests for training and employment from persons with disabilities. Both projects were funded by the European Social Fund and were intended to increase opportunities for sustainable employment for persons with disabilities by encouraging companies to retain such persons on their staff for longer periods of time. The projects aimed to secure employment for 200 persons with permanent disabilities aged 29 years and under and 800 such persons aged over 29 years.

37. Under the Vocational Education and Training Act, specific vocational training for jobs involving routine activities and actions would be provided to persons with different types of disability, including children with visual or hearing impairments, persons with special educational needs and persons with intellectual disabilities. In accordance with article 32 of the Act, children with chronic diseases would be given vocational training and education that was appropriate to their state of health. The Ministry of Education and Science, together with the Ministry of Health, had determined the jobs that were appropriate for young persons with different types of disability. Persons with psychosocial disabilities tended to find employment in social enterprises.

38. **Mr. Koralski** (Bulgaria) said that, as a result of programmes intended to promote entrepreneurship among persons with disabilities, 150 such persons had started their own businesses, some 95 per cent of which had been successful.

39. **Ms. Miteva** (Bulgaria) said that, through the Agency for Social Assistance, measures had been taken to promote the social integration of persons with disabilities by facilitating their access to transport, information, nutritious food and other support. In 2017, around 100,000 persons with disabilities had received such support. Additional support was provided to enable persons with disabilities to obtain treatment abroad. A monthly allowance was provided to children with permanent disabilities to ensure that their basic needs were met in a home environment. In 2017, 26,000 children had received a total of 161 million leva.

40. **Mr. Baychev** (Bulgaria) said that refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities were entitled to the same support as Bulgarian citizens. Under a bill that was currently being drafted, foreign nationals with disabilities who held a residence permit, had refugee status or were under temporary protection would be entitled to the same rights as Bulgarian citizens. Under draft legislation that was expected to be adopted in 2019, persons with disabilities would receive a monthly allowance intended to offset the cost of their disability;

the amount would be based on the level of disability and the individual's needs. Persons with disabilities would also receive support for medical devices, transportation, housing and rehabilitation services. Under the new legislation, it would be possible to submit applications for such support by post or by electronic means. The level of support would be calculated on the basis of the poverty threshold and would increase every year.

41. **Mr. Koralski** (Bulgaria) said that, although current legislation placed restrictions on the legal capacity of persons with certain disabilities, the parliament was expected to discuss the provisions in question, with a view to amending them, by the end of 2018. Special arrangements were made to enable persons with all types of disabilities to vote. In accordance with draft legislation that was due to be resubmitted to parliament after being redrafted, Bulgarian Sign Language would be legally recognized and a methodology for training sign language interpreters would be established. Braille had been officially recognized in 1944. A number of cultural centres catered for readers of Braille and 10 to 15 Braille books were published every year. An application had been developed that enabled blind persons and persons with visual impairments to use the Internet.

42. The Government placed significant emphasis on the promotion of sports for young people, including those with disabilities. Almost all sports facilities were accessible for persons with disabilities. Bulgaria was one of the few countries in which it was possible to study adapted physical education at university level. Specialist trainers helped persons with disabilities to participate in a range of sports and, thanks to government funding, a number of Bulgarian athletes with disabilities had achieved a significant level of success, including at an international level. Persons with disabilities who visited Bulgaria as tourists were advised to visit the Devetashka Cave, the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, the town of Sozopol and the town of Pomorie, all of which were well adapted for persons with disabilities, as were many museums, theatres and hotels in Sofia and elsewhere.

43. The Convention was a special treaty because it was aimed at placing persons with disabilities on an equal footing with the rest of society. Measures intended to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities should cohere into a sustainable policy that could be implemented in daily life for the benefit of persons with disabilities as well as their families. The dialogue between the delegation and the Committee would provide the Government with useful guidance for improving the legal framework on disability and protecting the high standards enjoyed by persons with disabilities in Bulgaria. The Government would carefully consider all the recommendations put to it by the Committee. It was fully committed to promoting inter-institutional coordination and working with all stakeholders, including international and non-governmental organizations, to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

44. **Mr. Tatić** (Country Rapporteur) said that the dialogue had been open, constructive and sincere and that it had been a privilege and a pleasure to be the Country Rapporteur for Bulgaria. The Government should continue to consider its approach to deinstitutionalization; in that regard, he would refer the delegation to the Committee's general comment No. 5 (2017). It was hoped that a number of crucial laws would shortly be adopted, including the new Persons with Disabilities Act, the Natural Persons and Support Measures Act and the proposed law on personal assistance. The State party should continue to monitor all instances of violence and abuse committed against persons with disabilities and should strive to increase its investment in inclusive education and employment in the open labour market for persons with disabilities.

45. **Ms. Manolova** (Ombudsman, Bulgaria) said that she was grateful to Mr. Tatić and to the Committee for having given her the opportunity to participate in the dialogue. The individuals and organizations fighting for the rights of persons with disabilities in Bulgaria were very courageous and had turned the fight for those rights into a central issue for Bulgarian society, which was now ready to undertake the necessary reforms.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.